



On Armando Liwanag et al.'s Harangues Against the First Congress of the National Democratic Front

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To: National Council and National Executive Committee,
affiliate organizations, leaders and members of the National
Democratic Front.

Fellow elected members of the last legitimate plenum of the
Central Committee (Ninth Plenum, 1985), cadres, and members
of the Communist Party of the Philippines

In February 1993, I received from an ally and friend a document with the following serial number and title: Resolution NDF-002, 10th Plenum of the Central Committee 1992 -- Objections of the Party to the NDF Congress and Relation Decisions.

The document criticized and denounced the events that took place, the decisions made, and my role in the preparation and conduct of the first NDF Congress.

It appears that this resolution was made in 1992 during a meeting of eight regular members and three alternate members of the Central Committee which they declared as the 10th Plenum of the Central Committee. I was in prison at that time and that happened without my knowledge.

When I was released from detention, the hype against me and several other comrades -- the so called 'rectification movement' -- was at its peak. I was held accountable, judged, and condemned for numerous sins and crimes without being given any notice whatsoever regarding these charges against me.

The 'hate campaign' reached such an extent that Armando Liwanag [Armando Liwanag, the chairman of the CPP, is widely believed to be the pseudonym of Jose Ma. Sison -- Eds.], in complete violation of Party rules, willfully and shamelessly attacked and maligned me and two other comrades in the media. But those who arrogated unto themselves the authority and the name of the Central Committee did not even bother to inform me of anything.

Until today, I have not been granted an iota of due process through which the exact charges against me can be understood, the evidence presented and weighed, and where I can air my side and confront Liwanag and the couple who have hurled these charges.

In the same way that I was forced to defend myself against Sison's media assault, I have no other choice but to reply openly outside the established processes, in order that my side can be heard.

I also wish to take this opportunity -- as the 20th anniversary of the founding of the NDF is celebrated -- to clarify many things regarding the holding of its first Congress.

Charge No. 1 of Liwanag et al.:

The central leadership of the Party was not given the chance to fully examine and approve the final plan of the program. These were railroaded by a member of the PB-CC (Politburo-Central Committee) who illegally usurped the authority of the central leadership of the Party and of the whole Party. Furthermore, because of unforeseen circumstances, the official representative of the Party was not able to attend the Congress. The representation and participation of the Party in the NDF Congress was therefore inadequate and without prior authorization.

My reply:

First, on the orientation for the establishment of the NDF: that this was to consist of the Party and the mass organizations under its leadership, to be organized as a federation, and to perform the functions of a political center, has been a long-standing policy of the Party. The decision was taken by the Ninth Plenum in 1985 and reaffirmed by the Politburo in 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, and 1990.

Secondly, the NDF Program presented during the first Congress was discussed and approved by a meeting of the PB-CC in January 1990. There were no disputes on the major issues, neither was there a single protesting vote. No objections were registered with regard to the principles of democratic pluralism and mixed economy within the framework of a dominant controlling state sector and other forms of collective ownership. No objection was registered regarding the absence of a formal endorsement of working class leadership, through the Party, over the NDF.

The Program went through extensive discussion, review, modification, and rewriting. It passed through editing by several groups of writers and consultations and exchanges of opinions and criticisms within the ranks of the United Front Commission (UFC) and among regional representatives and members of the Central Committee itself for almost five years. Most important, the series of drafts had been pending for several years before the EC-CC (Executive Committee-Central Committee) and PB-CC.

Third, the Constitution was presented during the NDF Congress. Prior to this it was reviewed, commented on, amended, and approved in a July 1990 meeting by members of the PB-CC, or in the words of Comrade Selo (acting chairman of the PB-CC) an 'expanded EC-CC.' Comrade Selo presided over the meeting and gave the go-signal for the Congress. This was also the process that the Political Report underwent, which was based on documents of the PB-CC and EC-CC, particularly, the Party's anniversary statement in 1988.

Liwanag et al., claim that these discussions on the Constitution and Political Report were done hastily and that the documents were subjected to discussion simply to get the stamp of approval for what was already a *fait accompli*. But if there was anyone who should be blamed for this, it is none other than the 'et al.' couple. They refused to call a meeting of the Politburo despite the urgent instruction of the collective during its meeting in January 1990.

They cannot deny the fact that during the whole day and night of discussions on these two papers, not a single major objection was raised or registered. There was no indication whatsoever of what they now loudly claim to be their objection: that the 'subordination' of the Party to the NDF as a federation would 'surround' the Party with a sea of non-proletarian forces, 'tie its hands,' and result in its being 'outvoted and outnumbered' by non-proletarian organizations.

Fourth, the calling of the NDF Congress clearly stands on the deliberations and decisions of the PB-CC in January 1990 on: (1.) the review, approval,

modifications, and additions done on the NDF Program; (2.) how many and who to nominate in the elections of the NDF national leadership; (3.) the scheduled date of the Congress – April 1990; (4.) alternative venues – Eastern or Western Visayas or Northern Luzon; (5.) number and qualifications of the delegates; and, (6.) the appointment of Paco Arguelles to supervise the preparations and final review of the Congress documents. In fact, the PB-CC no longer scheduled any further discussion regarding these matters, since on no basic or major point was there any controversy or inability to reach unity.

And *fifth*, during the meeting of the PB-CC or 'expanded EC-CC' in July, it was agreed that from the central leadership of the Party, the 'et al.' couple, and myself were to attend the NDF Congress: Comrade Selo in his capacity as acting Chairman of the Party, Comrade Ria with a still undefined designation, and I as head of the Preparatory Commission for the Congress (a special unit of the Party).

I left for the Congress site several days ahead of the two comrades and was able to reach the place. But they were not able to do so, because, unfortunately, they were caught by the earthquake of July 1990 in Baguio City. It took a long time before they could go out of the calamity-stricken area, and it would have taken a much longer time for them to reach the Congress site due to extensive damage to the highway going there. The territory sponsoring the gathering reported that the unit sent to fetch the two comrades had no news about them.

Meanwhile, a problem was arising in the place where the Congress was to be held. The NPA unit and territorial forces had been encamped in the area since April to prepare and secure it. The rainy season was at hand, and entry into and exit from the site would have been made more difficult. Because the great majority of those expected to attend were already gathered, I gave the go-signal to start the Congress.

Under these emergency conditions, I took on the responsibility of pushing through with the Congress and acted as the representative of the Party. It is my honest belief that, within the tradition and custom of mutual cooperation and support among comrades in one committee or collective, this does not amount to *"illegal usurpation of the authority of the Party's central leadership and of the whole Party"* but is instead *the performance of duties and the exercises of responsible initiative by a member of the Party center faced with an extraordinary situation.*

The leader of the army and highest Party official in the area can attest to the fact that I repeatedly asked to find some way of enabling the two other comrades to attend the Congress. It would have been grossly impractical had the Congress

been postponed or rescheduled to a new date and venue for the sole reason that the two comrades were unable to participate. After all, the decisions of the PB-CC regarding the NDF and the Congress were quite clear and unequivocal, and there was no major issue where unity was not reached.

I made certain to the best of my abilities, and with the help of the leading comrades of the UFC, to carry out and realize the decisions of the PB-CC in 1990 regarding the NDF Congress. And this was what really happened, if the results of the Congress were to be judged honestly and fairly, without malice and envy. One or two persons not on the list of those nominated by the Party were elected. Discussions on some topics lacked sufficient breadth and depth. But, on the whole, the spirit, decisions, design, and plans of the PB-CC on the NDF Congress were fulfilled.

I recognize my own shortcomings in handling the preparatory work for the Congress. The writing and editing of the Constitution and Political Report took longer time than expected, thus, shortening the period for reaching unity on the contents of these documents. The participation of some regions in the Congress was also not fully insured.

By June, those of us in the Preparatory Commission estimated that 75 to 80 percent of the preparatory work had been completed. If the Congress had been postponed again, more likely than not, it would not have been held at all in 1990. The only guerilla front which responded positively to our search for a venue in February would no longer be available. Since a large number of the delegates were prepared to attend and the resources and facilities ready, the opportunity would have been wasted. We took the decisive step of pushing through with the Congress, and if there were inadequacies, to make up for them during the Congress itself.

The NDF Congress was held successfully and smoothly. Though there were a few shortcomings, the basic requisites were fulfilled. The attacks and harangues by Liwanag et al. are all without basis.

Charge No. 2 by Liwanag et al.:

But the objections of the Party to the concluded Congress and its documents are not simply on the issue of process or rules, but, more importantly, on the issue of principles.

Not only the principle of democratic centralism within the Party was violated but the correct principles of the leading role of the working class through the Party and the united front.

The historical and continuing initiative of the Party, the leading role of the working class, and the two-stage revolution were not mentioned to serve the purpose of 'broadening' the united front or enticing the non-proletarian forces and organizations to the NDF.

The advanced detachment of the working class was downgraded to the level of an ordinary member-organization of a federation instead of being treated as an allied or cooperating organization within a united front or alliance.

In diluting and eliminating the two-stage revolution, the wrong idea became widespread that when the national democratic revolution is completed upon the seizure of political power, the goal is not to commence the socialist revolution but to build a national democratic economy and society.

While the wrong concept of federation is said to be the organizational principle of the NDF...there are no provisions in the draft NDF Constitution that individuals, not representing any organization or substantial tendency, can become members of the NDF and be given rights equal as those of organizations, including the Party.

My reply:

That this kind of argumentation is both illogical and unethical strikes one immediately. The concept of the NDF as a federation and political center, the lack of any mention within its program of the leading role of the working class through its Party, the absence of any express formulation of a two-stage revolution, and even the granting of individual membership within the NDF were decisions of the central organs of the Party -- the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee and the succeeding meetings of the PB-CC.

Let us assume for the sake of argument that these decisions were wrong. If these were upheld and approved in the NDF Congress, why should the NDF, its Congress, and the Party cadres who campaigned and worked to realize these decisions be the target of blame, attacks, and criticisms by Liwanag et al.?

How could the democratic centralism within the Party have been violated when these decisions came from the central organ of the Party itself? Why were not these central organs, which included themselves, not criticized and held to account?

The aforementioned decisions were of long standing and had long been known by Liwanag. Why did he have to wait after the NDF Congress to speak his piece? The 'et al.' couple took part in making the decisions of the Party regarding the NDF. If they had changed their minds after the Congress was held, they should

make it clear to everyone that they did so. Decency requires that they refrain from using other comrades as scapegoats to evade their own responsibility and to make a display of their unalloyed loyalty to Liwanag's line.

Should it be necessary to change the character and structure of the NDF, the Party is obliged, at the very least, to take into account the fact that the NDF has been formally organized and there are processes and rules governing its conduct. This is a moral and political obligation because the Party took part and took the lead in calling for the Congress and establishing the NDF.

All the furor raised by Liwanag et al., from 1990 to 1991 against the NDF Congress, including his prohibiting the dissemination of the basic Congress documents and blocking the full operation of its elected leadership, is disgraceful behavior and diminishes respect for the Party.

In fact, the diatribes unleashed by Liwanag et al., from 1990 to 1991, against the NDF Congress, the ban on the distribution of its Program and Constitution, and the obstructions placed against the effective functioning of its elected leadership, constitute gross violations of the Party's democratic centralism. Let us not even talk of the questionable legality of the "Tenth Plenum" which approved the resolution on the NDF Congress.

Secondly, Liwanag et al.'s document incorporated phantoms and fantasies, overloaded concepts, and elements of farce in what should have been a critique of the Party's experience in forming the NDF.

In 1985, the Party leadership recognized that the concept of the NDF as a united front of different political forces that would not engage in armed struggle nor enter a front (coalition), overwhelmingly dominated by Party forces. The 1985 Plenum decided to continue with the organization of an NDF, but composed only of the Party and of the organizations under its leadership.

Thus, the prevailing concept of the NDF as a united front of different political forces was discarded.

But the new concept of the NDF needed to be clarified because such an organization would be radically different from the fronts which had become known in other countries or that which we know from our country's history. True enough, the nature of almost all the organizations affiliated with the NDF were non-proletarian -- something over which Liwanag et al., repeatedly expressed alarm. However, all of these organizations are sectoral, do not have an independent

political program like that of a political party, have a large and effective core of communists, and recognize the political leadership of the Party.

In reality, if we were to adhere to a strict definition, this kind of NDF is not exactly a genuine united front organization.

On the other hand, there are certain requirements of the revolution which can be met more appropriately and effectively by a front-type formation distinct from the Party. These needs are: (1.) broadly drawing in and organizing the middle forces and strata, through sectoral as well as multisectoral channels; (2.) organizing overseas Filipinos; (3.) conducting international solidarity work; (4.) establishing a framework for organizing and relating to minorities; (5.) establishing linkages and mutual cooperation with other political forces, outside of what the Party can achieve; (6.) linking up and organizing the upper social strata, traditional institutions, the bureaucracy, and the military; and, (7.) projecting the whole national democratic revolution and program both nationally and internationally.

All of these needs were delineated by the 1985 Plenum based on the Party's actual experience and the envisioned trajectory of revolutionary work. Among the other functions being considered for the NDF that year was the coordination of multisectoral struggles and political campaigns. Unity was not reached on this point from the very beginning, and eventually, it was dropped for its impracticality. The NDF was also designated as the national framework for the emerging local organs of political power while there was yet no political government. This concept, as well as how it was to be realized, became the focus of much contention. The scope of diplomatic work of the NDF was still limited and was under study in relation to the Party's own work in this arena.

The specific and distinct concept of the NDF as a 'political center,' which was formulated by the 1985 plenum and further fleshed out in the 1987 and 1988 PB-CC meetings, were attempts to establish a front-type formation which would respond to the aforementioned needs of the revolution. This determined the shape of the NDF formation carried in its first Congress last July 1990.

This is very remote from Liwanag's chimera of a 'federation center' where the party would become 'subordinate to,' 'encircled by,' and 'constricted by' non-proletarian organizations. This does not have the faintest similarity to what Liwanag decries as a 'scheme' to subordinate the Party to a 'federation' of non-proletarian forces.

Of course, the NDF is not exempt from the dynamism of class struggle. But Liwanag overloads the concepts and categories he is using when he applies the principles governing the work of a proletarian party within a united front of varying classes and political forces to a formation such as the NDF which is made up of the Party and sectoral organizations under its leadership.

In fact, what more appropriately applies to the NDF are the principles of Party leadership over and relations with mass organizations, whether proletarian and non-proletarian. But even here, the authoritarian and absolutist attitude of Liwanag prevents him from upholding the principle of respect for the integrity and dynamism of these organizations and recognizing that the Party must exercise its leadership by showing the right direction, setting a good example, and using debate and reason.

The problem in the relationship between the Party and the NDF lies not in the concept of the NDF as a federation. It lies in defining the proper position and scope of responsibility the NDF should have within the broad scale of tasks and political work of the revolution.

The question posed -- whether the Party is under the NDF-- raises the hackles of Liwanag et al. Their Stalinist sensibilities are offended. But this question can be answered correctly once it is understood dialectically: the Party is both under and not under the NDF. It is both inside and outside the NDF.

The Party has such a wide scale of action, both actual and potential. The Party is the political leader of the army and the armed struggle. It controls the guerilla fronts and bases. It exercises overall supervision over mass struggles. It retains its independence and initiative in interacting with other political forces. It continues to have the right to engage in diplomatic work abroad.

On the other hand, in exchange for the advantages to the revolution brought by the NDF, the Party accepts certain appropriate limitations and the need to make some adjustments in its scope and conduct of revolutionary work. For example, the NDF serves as the channel for establishing relations and cooperation with the Moro National Liberation Front and Moro Islamic Liberation Front which do not wish to relate directly to a communist party.

In my view, the NDF was designated to do certain tasks which it was not in a position to effectively accomplish, thus making it appear merely as the decorative facade of the Party. It also sowed confusion with respect to the relations of the NDF and the Party.

The NDF should not have been made to handle peace negotiations with the government. The Party is the effective leader of the army and the armed struggle and, as such, would call the shots all throughout the talks. And in fact, from the Party flowed all decisions on each and every tactic and move in the negotiations. The role played by the NDF is in forging the broadest consensus both within and outside the movement on the correct and proper position of the movement on the issues related to peace.

One other unsuitable task for the NDF is the coordination of multisectoral struggles and mass campaigns. Our practice clearly shows that it is the legal federation of mass organizations which would take charge of this.

Liwanag's solution to turn the NDF into a confederal, consultative, and consensual type of organization will surely enlarge even more the already ample area for maneuver of the Party within the NDF. Coupled with the formal and constitutional declaration of Party leadership over the NDF, the latter's personality and dynamism will be totally obliterated. The NDF will become just an apparition.

But no matter how cleverly Liwanag thinks he has solved the problems he imagined, he has become entangled in his own constructs. In the consensual type of organization which he envisions for the NDF, would not the consent of a single organization become all-important? Would not the proletarian party forever run the risk of being stalemated by one of those non-proletarian organizations it is wary of? And what would happen to the NDF should no consensus be reached?

That the NDF Program and Constitution should not contain any mention of the leadership of the working class through its party and of the two-stage revolution was a decision of the 1985 plenum. Liwanag et al., are appalled at the purpose behind this: to broaden the NDF. But wasn't the NDF precisely organized in order to win over the middle strata who, though they are willing to embrace the NDF's program for national democratic change in the country, are not yet ready to accept socialism and the leadership of a proletarian party?

Another reason for the Plenum's decision was to avoid the interpretation that the Party would exercise organizational leadership over the NDF.

Whether Liwanag intended it or not, the issues in which he has embroiled the NDF have only served to underscore what the original Leninist spirit and meaning of leadership by a proletarian party should be: that it is proven and asserted through deeds, not by fiat or formal guarantees; that it is not a privilege permanently enjoyed but a mandate that must continually be renewed in the course of the people's revolutionary struggle.